Reviewer’s report

Title: Creating a Knowledge Translation Platform: Nine Lessons from the Zambia Forum for Health Research

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Reviewer: Fadi El-Jardali

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General Comment:

While knowledge translation platforms (KTP) are at various stages of implementation in different countries including Zambia, little yet is known about them, particularly in terms of outcomes and impacts when it comes to improving the use of evidence in policy. More importantly, limited information is yet available on the lessons learned from the creation of KTP. Thus, this commentary about the lessons learned from the Zambia Forum for Health Research provides a good contribution and address some gaps in the literature. I have no doubt that this will be a commentary paper that readers will find useful including KTP teams from other countries. This commentary is relevant and timely and would help guide the debate regarding KTPs.

Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
- None

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)
- None

Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)

While the manuscript is a commentary (which does not have a specific methodology and data sources) it would be useful to acknowledge some limitations in deriving the nine lessons, and perhaps emphasize the need for a study (or studies) by capturing lessons learned from ZAMFOHR’s work by soliciting views of board member, RAG members, sample of policy makers, stakeholders and researchers in Zambia. Such work could provide a thorough and in-depth analysis of the experience and lessons.

It would be useful if the commentary can acknowledge / refer to the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) work that is being currently conducted by the McMaster Knowledge Translation team, since Zambia is included. The authors mentioned about the list of activities that were conducted by ZAMFOHR, particularly policy briefs and policy dialogues, assessing demands of policy makers, etc. The
current M&E work is focused on monitoring and evaluating activities, outputs, outcome and impact of applying those KT tools to influence policies (such as brief and dialogues). In addition, the team is working on capturing the lessons learned from evidence-to-policy initiatives in several countries through structured reflection.

It would be useful to state the 'variables and/or indicators' that were selected to qualitatively identify the nine lessons.

It seems that sustainability of KTP is critical, particularly when funding is limited. It would be useful if some thoughts would be given to some revenue generating activities that KTP can do in order to generate (or match) funding. In other words, how can KTPs be not (or solely) dependent on external and internal funding schemes. This would certainly help make the case for improvement in current functioning.

It would be also useful if authors can provide a clearer description of the context and actors in Zambia (i.e. partners, engagement, relationship with academic institutions, trust, visibility of ZAMFOHR among policymakers and researchers, system changes, how the original plan will inform the new plan and objectives for ZAMFOHR, etc.)

The issue of capacity building and training for KTP staff as well as researchers and policy makers is critical. It would be useful to reflect more on this, based on the experience of ZAMFOHR. Particularly, how training can be more focused and targeted to the right mix of people in additions to ways to address the challenges in the ability to attract, recruit and retain technical staff working in KTPs.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Declaration of competing interests:**

Neither I nor the institution with which I work in will benefit from the publication of this commentary. However, I am one of the evidence-to-policy fellows involved in the monitoring and evaluation of KTPs in several countries including Zambia, as part of a program (Sponsoring National Processes) that is supported by the Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research.